

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----017543 182324Z /62

O 182219Z SEP 77
FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV
TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 8309
INFO AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMMAN PRIORITY 0231
AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 TEL AVIV 6993

EXDIS

E.O. 11752: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MILI, MOPS, LE, IS
SUBJECT: SOUTH LEBANON

REF: (A) STATE 224011 (B) STATE 223973

1. I MET WITH DEFENSE MINISTER WEIZMAN AT 1900 HOURS
TONIGHT AT HIS OFFICE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENSE. FOLLOWING
A BRIEFING BY HIM OF THE SITUATION ON THE BORDER (REPORTED
SEPTEL BY DAO), I PROCEEDED TO CARRY OUT THE INSTRUCTIONS
IN REFTELS. WEIZMAN LISTENED IMPASSIVELY WITHOUT INTERRUPTION
AS I WENT CAREFULLY AND SLOWLY THROUGH EACH POINT OF THE
INSTRUCTIONS. A STENOGRAPHER WAS PRESENT TO MAKE A VERBATIM
RECORD, SO I HAVE LITTLE CONCERN THAT WHAT WAS SAID WILL
BE SUBJECT TO MISUNDERSTANDING.

2. AFTER HEARING ME OUT, WEIZMAN BRISKLY PROCEEDED TO HIS
CENTRAL POINT FROM WHICH HE DID NOT DEVIATE FOR THE
REMAINDER OF THE CONVERSATION: ISRAEL PROPOSES AN
IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE, BUT WITH NO PRE-CONDITIONS. HE

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SAID THAT ONCE A CEASE-FIRE WAS ESTABLISHED THE ISRAELIS
WERE PREPARED TO NEGOTIATE ON THE "LITANI QUESTION," THE TEN
KILOMETER ZONE AND "EVERYTHING ELSE." BUT HE WAS
ADAMANT THAT IN THE ABSENCE OF ANY NEGOTIATION THE
ISRAELIS WOULD HOLD TO THEIR POSITION THAT ALL PALESTINIANS
SHOULD WITHDRAW NORTH AND WEST OF THE LITANI.

3. REPEATEDLY WEIZMAN SAID THAT WHAT WAS NOW ESSENTIAL WAS AN IMMEDIATE UNCONDITIONAL CEASE-FIRE. HE SAID HE WAS MAKING THIS PROPOSAL WITH THE FULL KNOWLEDGE AND BACKING OF PRIME MINISTER BEGIN. WHEN I ASKED IF THIS PROPOSAL INCLUDED ASSURANCES THAT THE ISRAELIS WOULD HOLD THE CHRISTIAN FORCES IN CHECK DURING A CEASE-FIRE, HE ANSWERED THAT IT DID, BUT ONLY FOR A LIMITED PERIOD, POSSIBLY TWO OR THREE WEEKS. (COMMENT: SUBSEQUENTLY, WEIZMAN SOFTENED HIS POSITION ON THIS POINT BY NOTING IT WOULD NOT BE PRUDENT TO PUT ANY ARTIFICIAL TIME LIMIT ON A CEASE-FIRE "SO LONG AS IT APPEARED WE WERE MAKING PROGRESS IN TALKING TO ONE ANOTHER.")

4. I ASKED UNDER WHAT CIRCUMSTANCES DID WEIZMAN ENVISAGE TALKS TAKING PLACE. HE SAID THEY SHOULD BE UNDER UN AUSPICES. HE HAD TOLD GENERAL SILASVUO LAST WEEK THAT ISRAEL PREFERRED SUCH TALKS TO BE HELD ALONG THE BORDER IN METULLA OR RAS NAQURA. ISRAEL WOULD GO TO RHODES IF NEED BE (WHICH HE UNDERSTOOD THE LEBANESE FAVORED), BUT PREFERRED NOT TO BECAUSE OF THE PRESENCE ON THE ISLAND OF THE PLO. DESPITE EFFORTS TO POINT OUT TO HIM THAT SO FAR AS WE WERE AWARE THE LEBANESE CONSIDERED THAT TALKS UNDER ILMAC AUSPICES SHOULD BE RELATED SOLELY TO POST-SETTLEMENT ISSUES AND THEY DID NOT ENTERTAIN ANY NOTION OF USING THEM FOR NEGOTIATIONS ON IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SHTOURA AGREEMENT, WEIZMAN REFUSED TO BE SIDE-SECRET

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TRACKED FROM HIS MAIN THESES. "YOU USE YOUR GOOD OFFICES TO PUT THIS TOGETHER."

5. I TOLD WEIZMAN HE HAD A REPUTATION FOR BEING A REALIST, AND THAT WHILE I WOULD IMMEDIATELY CONVEY HIS PROPOSAL TO WASHINGTON IT SEEMED CRYSTAL CLEAR TO ME THAT THE ONLY REALISTIC COURSE FOR ISRAEL TO PURSUE AT THE MOMENT WAS TO LEND ITS SUPPORT TO IMPLEMENTING THE SHTOURA AGREEMENT. I THEN LED HIM BACK INTO ALL THE SAME POINTS WE HAVE DRUMMED AT THE ISRAELIS OVER THE PAST MONTH AS TO WHY THIS IS IN THEIR SELF-INTEREST. WEIZMAN WENT STRAIGHT BACK TO HIS REFRAIN OF THE NECESSITY FOR A CEASE-FIRE AND THE NEED TO START TALKING. NOTHING COULD BE DECIDED WHILE THE SHELLS WERE STILL FLYING. AND, LIKE US, HE WAS GRAVELY CONCERNED ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF AN ESCALATION OF HOSTILITIES. EVERYTHING WAS OPEN TO NEGOTIATION; THE ONLY THING TO DO WAS TO START TALKING.

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO PRIORITY

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM PRIORITY

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EXDIS

6. COMMENT: THE LEBANESE RESPONSE DID NOT PHASE WEIZMAN IN THE LEAST. HE WAS PREPARED FOR IT, AND DID NOT BAT AN EYELASH AS I CONVEYED IT TO HIM. HIS COUNTER OFFER OF AN IMMEDIATE CEASE-FIRE TACTICALLY IS A LOGICAL NEXT MOVE FOR THE ISRAELIS TO MAKE. AND THE PROPOSAL FOR NEGOTIATIONS WITH THE LEBANESE IS CONSISTENT WITH ISRAELI STRATEGY OF SEEKING MEANS AND CIRCUMSTANCES TO TREAT DIRECTLY WITH ITS NORTHERN NEIGHBOR. WHETHER HE THINKS HIS PROPOSAL STANDS THE SLIGHTEST CHANCE OF BEING ACCEPTED, I AM LESS CERTAIN.

7. READING BETWEEN THE LINES OF WEIZMAN'S PRESENTATION, THREE ELEMENTS SEEM TO ME TO MERIT COMMENT:
A. THE ISRAELIS HAVE MODERATED THEIR STAND ON WITHDRAWAL OF PLO UNITS TO POSITIONS NORTH AND WEST OF THE LITANI. ALTHOUGH THEIR OBJECTIVE OF REMOVAL OF ALL ARMED PALESTINIANS OUT OF THESE AREAS REMAINS UNCHANGED, WEIZMAN CLEARLY SIGNED TONIGHT THIS IS A MAXIMUM POSITION AND IS NOW SUBJECT TO NEGOTIATION, (I.E., THROUGH DIRECT TALKS OR VIA OUR GOOD OFFICES.)

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B. THE GOI IS NOT PREPARED TO GUARANTEE THAT THE CHRISTIAN FORCES WOULD MAINTAIN A CEASE-FIRE WITHOUT

THE PRIOR CONDITION THAT ALL PLO FORCES AGREE TO
WITHDRAW NORTH OF THE LITANI AND FROM THE ARQUOB.

C. IN THE ABSENCE OF A CEASE-FIRE, WEIZMAN INSISTS
THAT THE GOI HAS A "MORLA OBLIGATION" TO CONTINUE TO
SUPPORT AND PROTECT THE CHRISTIAN FORCES. SPECIFICALLY,
AT THE MOMENT THIS INCLUDES ENSURING THAT HADDAD'S MEN
ARE NOT PUSHED OUT OF TEL SHARIFAH. I REITERATED SEVERAL
TIMES TO HIM IN VERY STRONG TERMS THE WARNING CONTAINED
IN PARAGRAPH 3 (REF A) CONCERNING AN ESCALATION IN THE
FIGHTING. IF THIS MADE ANY DENT ON HIM, HE DISGUISED IT
VERY WELL. BY HIS REPEATED ASSERTION THAT THE ISRAELIS
WOULD NOT ALLOW THE CHRISTIAN FORCES IN TEL SHARIFAH TO
BE OVER-WHELMED BY THE PALESTINIANS IN ANY FUTURE COUNTER
ATTACK, HE SEEMED TO BE AWFULLY CLOSE TO DARING US TO
PUT UP OR SHUT UP.

D. DESPITE ALL THE ARGUMENTS I OFFERED IN FAVOR OF
GIVING THE SHTOURA AGREEMENT A CHANCE TO TAKE ROOT,
WEIZMAN HUNG TOUGH ON HIS PROPOSAL OF AN IMMEDIATE CEASE-
FIRE AND TALKS WITH THE LEBANESE. HE REFUSES
(OBVIOUSLY FOR TACTICAL REASONS) TO ACCEPT BOUTROS' STATEMENT
THAT THE GOL HAS NO LEVERAGE TO NEGOTIATE A FURTHER
WITHDRAWAL OF PLO FORCES FROM SOUTH LEBANON. AND HE SEEMS
TO BE ATTEMPTING TO EDGE US CLOSER TO A SITUATION WHERE WE
NO LONGER ARE ACTING SOLELY AS GO-BETWEENS BUT WILL BECOME
MORE ACTIVELY ENGAGED AS PARTICIPANTS TO THE NEGOTIATIONS.

8. I CONTINUE TO BELIEVE THE ISRAELIS ARE GAMBLING THAT
WE ARE SO ANXIOUS TO ACHIEVE FURTHER IMPLEMENTATION OF
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THE SHTOURA AGREEMENT THAT IN THE END WE WILL EXERT
SUFFICIENT PRESSURE ON THE PARTIES TO THE AGREEMENT THAT
AT LEAST A PORTION OF THE IMMEDIATE GOI OBJECTIVE WILL
BE REALIZED: A WIDENING AND SANITIZING OF THE SECURITY
BELT ON THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE FRONTIER. AMBASSADOR LEWIS,
WHO HAS BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS PROBLEM MUCH LONGER THAN I,
MAY HAVE ANOTHER VIEW TO OFFER ON THIS FINAL POINT.
END COMMENT.
VIETS

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